

MUNICIPAL ADVISORY COUNCILS AN ALTERNATIVE FOR UNINCORPORATED COMMUNITIES

This article was prepared by Robert Van Horn, Program Director, Technical Assistance Programs, CSAC, who served as the Administrative Officer of the East Palo Alto Municipal Council from its inception until he assumed his present position with CSAC in October 1974.)

Twenty-five per cent of the population of California lives in unincorporated areas, with the overwhelming majority living in urbanized communities. Although many of these communities are not ready for annexation to adjacent cities or for incorporation, they generally share a common desire for a stronger direct role in those many decisions regarding their communities which must be made by their Boards of Supervisors. One of the most effective approaches in responding to this need has been the initiation of Municipal Advisory Councils, under the provisions of Section 31010, California Government Code.

This innovative approach was developed by the San Mateo County Board of Supervisors in 1967, in response to the many problems the Board regularly dealt with in the 18,000-population unincorporated community of East Palo Alto. Board Resolution #24079, creating the East Palo Alto Municipal Advisory Council, charged the Council with advising the Board "on all matters concerning services which are or may be provided...by the county or other local governmental agencies, including but not limited to, advice on matters of public safety, welfare, public works and planning." (This resolution was the foundation for Section 31010 which was passed in the summer of 1971.)

The five elected East Palo Alto council members are performing their advisory responsibilities in a manner similar to the County Planning Commission, Parks Commission and other commissions which have functional spheres of advisory responsibility. The primary difference is that the Municipal Council has a geographical sphere of advisory responsibility.

The EPAMAC has functioned in three major areas providing advisory service to the Board of Supervisors: zoning and subdivision activities, county and special district services and facilities, and long-range planning. The council has served its constituents in the following areas: as an information conveyor and complaint receiver, in obtaining services from non-county resources, and in providing a focus for community political activity.

The council and its staff have had the primary responsibility for obtaining more than \$7 million in grants from various federal agencies. The council developed proposals which resulted in the decentralization of the sheriff's department and probation department into the community. The council initiated a housing rehabilitation Neighborhood Development Program with Federal Urban Renewal funds; a delinquency diversion program involving a peer group

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"hearing"; an environmental improvement rat control project; and the decentralization of social security and state employment service offices into the community.

The council obtained three "701" planning grants for a General Plan which included major segments in human services. The EPAMAC took a leading role in long-range planning for the East Palo Alto County Water Works District, and even initiated two water rate increases to carry out these plans. The council also had a major role in the development of a new 48,000 square-foot county services building to house the various county agencies serving the community.

Following passage of the enabling legislation in 1971, a number of other counties have undertaken development of Municipal Advisory Councils. These efforts have ranged from single councils, such as Sonoma County in Windsor and Santa Barbara County in Isla Vista, to the 13 councils established in San Bernardino County in relationship to their LAFCo spheres of influence. The Boards of Supervisors in San Diego County and Orange County have each adopted policies and procedures relating to the initiation of councils, and several other counties now have them under consideration. Functions performed by the councils have ranged from the broad responsibilities assigned to East Palo Alto by San Mateo County to more narrow planning and zoning activities assigned to some of the San Bernardino MACs.

Methods of selecting council members have varied from direct election, as a part of the November General Election, to direct appointment by the Board of Supervisors. Provision of funds for operation have ranged from the use of General Funds to the use of county service area funds, and some counties have used a combination of both.

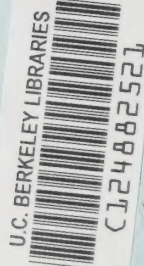
(Mr. Van Horn will be happy to answer inquiries about Municipal Advisory Councils and this article.)

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